



Asperger's on the Box and the Big Screen

By now I am guessing we all have seen that Hollywood and the TV networks are committed to continuing their love affair with Asperger's Syndrome. Seems it is our turn to be in the spotlight, our moment in the sun if you like. A good time to be reaping a harvest of awareness, progress, understanding I hope?

Have you noticed that the portrayals are becoming increasingly sympathetic, more accurate and nuanced - though one must, of course, allow for some serious concentration of symptomology in any given character, an exaggerated series of quirkinesses, especially when dealing with a medium that is boorishly driven by ratings and is always in a hurry to make its point – unlike us.

What can we take from the accents and depictions in movies and shows like Mozart and the Whale, Shortland Street, CSI, Snowflake, Bones, Boston Legal, Monk, Law and Order, PSI Factor, Grey's Anatomy, House, America's Next Top Model, The Big Bang Theory, The Black Balloon, Adam, P.S. I Love You, Numb3rs, 24, Naruto, Ben X, If You Could Say It In Words? (Yes, I can feel you kicking me for leaving your pet example out. Sorry. Likewise if you think I have been too free in my estimation of who is and who isn't one of us!)

It is more than just a case of entering the fascinating Asperger's portal to avoid having to re-hash and modernise yet another programme about "a prince rescuing yet another princess". I think it is about introducing a whole new dimension of wonderment to viewers, offering a new take on life itself, transporting audiences to another plane where humdrum and stolid sameness and grind have no place, where neurological kaleidoscopes plunge us all into unknown possibilities and ideas, untrammelled inventiveness, outrageous humaneness.

They don't fit in. Except together.



What information am I really seeing placed before the public about me by all this media fixation? About you too? This is important... from my perspective, it is much more about a culture, a way of being, than a disorder. Think passionate focus, not banal obsession. Painful hyper-empathy, not cold aloofness. Challenge, not disability. Learning, not being averse to new stuff. Different, not weird. Thorough, not pedantic. Interesting, not arcane. Methodical, not slavish. Honest, not game-playing. Intricate, not bizarre. Playful, not childish. Intelligent, not obsessed. Hero/Heroine, not basket case. Eventually understandable, not impossible. Right, not wrong. Having uncommon sense, not devoid of social skills. Transparent, not bound by secret agenda. Innocent, not naive. Helpful in return, not always helped. Wickedly funny, not staid and plain. Colourful, not monotonous. Living for now, not making endless plans. Real, not photo-shopped images. Free from expectations, not 'dying to fit in nicely'. Submerged torrents of sexiness, not bleak rocky outcrops of asexuality. Hard-working, not 'difficult to harness'. Overcomers, not succubers. Profound immediacy and freshness, not ancient musty catalogues of woe. Individually uniqueness, not being 'stuck in a role or type'. Containing endless possibilities within themselves, not lesser beings by any stretch of the imagination – but an altogether brand spanking new way to peer out upon and embrace the whole world and everything in it. Stop me if you think I am pushing the point too far. I am enthused. Are you?

For me Asperger's is about the slow-dawning hard-won eventual acceptance of the paradoxes in life, the hidden, the not-yet-encountered but well worthwhile. Contrast that with a saying that 'common-sense is the immediate apprehension of the bloody obvious' and perhaps you will get a sense of what I mean, uncommon-sense.

Are you out purchasing stocks in Asperger's as fast as the media moghuls are? Are you being totally bullish about your future? Are you ready to help translate all this media hype into a better future for yourself and other Aspies? We get seemingly idiotic responses from agencies and government departments to our plainly stated needs, we are excluded from our own care at every point – even by our own organisations, we are thirty more times to be homeless than we should ever need to be, ten times more likely to be unemployed than is credible or sane, we must face harshness from law enforcement officials who are ignorant far too frequently, endure narrow education pathways and strategies, struggle to have our comorbid conditions recognised so simple allowances can be made, we get lumped in with mental health groups and invalids as a matter of course, we are bullied from go to woe either physically or economically, are unaccommodated in our desire to have social relationships managed in a way more suited to us, and are just plain unrecognised, unaccepted, and unacknowledged as the very special type of people we all aspire to be.

It is time more than just Primetime TV sees us as deserving of some prime time. However long humanity has been around, *now* is so rightfully *our* time.

The Author, John Greally, is Information Coordinator at Asperger's Syndrome New Zealand.